

The misconceptions about Islam

The misconceptions about Islam Dr. Zakir Naik of Bombay, India

Summary of the lecture delivered by Dr. Zakir Naik of Bombay, India, on "The misconceptions about Islam", on Friday, November 26, 1999 at the Rakkah Stadium, Dammam, under the aegis of the Islamic Dawah and Guidance Center, Dammam. The meeting was coordinated by Mr. Ahmed Nooruddin of New York. Dear brothers and sisters, As-salaam-u-alaikum-wa-rahmatullah-wa-barkat-hu. May peace be with you and may God's mercy and blessings be on you. It is my honor to be here for the third time in three years. The topic of my lecture today is "Misconceptions about Islam". It is the duty of every Muslim to help remove some of the misconceptions non-Muslims have about Islam. By engaging in a dialogue with the non-Muslims, you will help lessen the level of anti-Muslim feelings in their hearts. These misconceptions prevent non-Muslims from seeing the beauty of Islam. Some of the methods of conveying the message of Islam are effective and some are ineffective. The best way to start a dialogue is to first ask them: "What is it that you do not like about Islam". This opening makes them feel comfortable to talk to you. Also, it gives you a good chance to know what they have to say about Islam in their own words. I have found from my lecture tours around the world that these misconceptions hinge around only 20 issues, by and large. I will try to cover as many of them today in the one hour I have to deliver my talk. I will also suggest ways you may tackle them. There may be one or two issues that may be unique to Singapore, or Malaysia, Canada, etc, but essentially the various issues can be grouped into only twenty. These issues change from time to time. What I will be listing are issues that non-Muslims of today bring up. Twenty years ago, these were not the issues... there were other issues. Similarly, twenty years from now, there will be different issues that will come up. So if you master the answers to these typical questions about today's misconceptions about Islam, you can help remove most of them from the hearts and minds of your non-Muslim friends. However, most lay non-Muslims have only about four or five issues they dislike about Islam; so it is not difficult for you to remove this animosity they have against Islam.

Misconception # 1: It is not civilized to have more than one wife at a time. Reply: The only religious book that says: "... then marry only once" is the Quran, the holy book of the Muslims. This injunction is not found in the Christian Bible in the Hindu Geeta, or in the Jewish holy book etc. In the Bible there are so many references to various prophets and kings who had numerous wives. Abraham had three wives, while King Solomon had seven hundred wives, etc. In the Hindu literature the various gods have hundreds of wives. Krishna had one thousand women and concubines. Similarly, the Jews used to marry more than once, till as late as the 1950s. None of these faiths regulated the number of wives a man could have at a time. Only Islam limits the wives to four. The monogamy that the Christians, the Hindus, and Jews practice today, is not from their religion, but from their government. So the issue of monogamy has no religious significance; it is a man-made rule. Monogamy was the result of an act of parliament, not their faith. Example: The Indian Parliament in 1954 passed the Hindu Marriage Act prohibiting the Hindu male from taking up more than one wife. The Jewish Rabbis in the 10th Century AD made monogamy a rule, although it was not enforced till as late as the 1950s. Similarly, the European countries and the American government passed laws to make monogamy the rule in their lands some time ago. Mormons still marry more than once. In Surah Nissah God allows a Muslim to marry, one, two, three or four women as long as he can do justice between them. If the man can't do justice, the exhortation for him is: "... then marry only once". Marrying more than once is not compulsory, but only an option to tide over unique circumstances that societies face from time to time. You will find in many societies today that the ratio between females and males is not 50:50. There are more females than males in Europe, USA and elsewhere. On the other hand, in India, because of the rampant female fetus abortions, the number of females is dropping, and a crisis is in the making, as not enough number of females will be available for Hindu men to marry a few years from now. The option for women in countries with a bigger female ratio than male is to share a husband with another women, to remain single, or to become public property. "Become public property" is a decent phrase I'm using for what it really means. Ask any woman who cannot find an unmarried man to marry, if it is a better choice to share a husband with another woman, to remain single, or to become a mere mistress. As a lawfully wedded wife she will get the same right as the first wife, get legal status for herself and her children, get inheritance rights for herself and her children, and most importantly, get respect and dignity. Becoming a mistress is no choice. In the West becoming a mistress or a girlfriend is no problem, but becoming a second wife is totally unacceptable. The government will come after you, the society will come after you...

Misconception # 2: There is no equality between genders in Islam, as Islam gives men the right to have more than one wife, but does it not give the same right to women to have more than one husband. Reply: Islam does not approve of polyandry, i.e., a woman taking up more than one husband. It is the male whose children the women bear. If a woman had multiple husbands, it would not be easy to know who is the biological father of the child. When a child is conceived, God puts love and affection in the hearts of the parents so that they can bring up the child. Without this love, life cannot be sustained. But if there was dispute about who really has fathered the child, there would be no love in the heart of the fathers. Psychologists say that children who grow up without knowing who their father is, are lacking in stability and maturity. These days because of scientific progress in DNA testing, one can say who the father is; but these tests were not available for mankind till now. Islam has historically provided for peace and stability in the family, not discord.

Misconception # 3: Islam subjugates women in a veil. Reply: If you look at history, to ancient civilizations, you will find that women were the oppressed people. They had no individual merit. The Babylonians used to punish the woman for her husband's mistakes. The ancient Egyptians did the same. Ancient Arabs buried their newly born daughters. It was Islam that uplifted the status of women. It gave women rights they never had before. Surah Nissah exhorts believing men to lower their gaze if a lady is passing by. Similarly, there are exhortations for women to lower their gaze if strange men are around. The Quran also speaks about the hijab for men and women to protect the modesty. The hijab for men is to cover their bodies minimally from their navel to the knees. The hijab for women is to cover their whole bodies except for their faces and hands below their wrists. There are descriptions for a female hijab, that it should cover the endowments including head, not be tight, not be

transparent, not be like the clothes of non-believers, and not be like the clothes of the other gender, etc. Women got the right to own, inherit property, and to dispose it of at will. Let me ask you a question: Suppose two identical twin sisters are walking down a street, and one of them is dressed in revealing clothing, while the other one is wearing a hijab. Who will be boys in the street whistle at or tease: the one who is scantily dressed in a mini-skirt, or the one who is modestly attired? The answer is obvious. The hijab is designed to prevent women from being molested. It brings peace to society and prevents mischief.

Misconception # 4: Capital punishment is barbaric. Reply: There are crimes for which Islam prescribes capital punishment, e.g. for rape, murder etc. This is to protect society from criminals and anti-social elements. In USA there are 2713 rapes taking place every day. In Islam, the penalty is to award the death penalty so that the criminal is not around to repeat this crime, and to teach others a lesson. Americans say that this is a severe punishment. They say that the rapist must be put in jail for the first rape. If after his release he rapes again, then it is ok to put him to death. Friends, statistics in USA show that 95 percent of the rapists, after release from jail, rape again. Islam prevents this second rape. Following the Hijab dress code prevents the rapist from temptation to rape.

Misconception # 5: Islam was spread by the sword. Reply: Nothing is far from the truth. It was the Islamic traders who served as excellent role models in the spread of Islam. In the book: "Islam at crossroads", the author, on page 8, says that this belief is a myth. Look at the number of Coptic Christians in Egypt. They number 14 million. Couldn't the Arabs have wiped them out or forcefully converted them to Islam? Look at India. In the 1,000 years that the Muslims ruled over this subcontinent, every one could have been forcefully converted to Islam. How can you explain that there are 800 million Hindus and others still in India? Which Muslim army went to Indonesia and Malaysia to convert them? These people converted by seeing the good behaviors of the Muslim/Arab traders. Readers' Digest says that between 1944 and 1984, a period of 50 years, saw more conversion to Islam in Europe and USA than to any faith. I am asking you, who went with a sword to convert these people to Islam? It is the sword of the intellect that converts people.

Misconception # 6: Muslims are fundamentalists. Reply: What is the definition of the word fundamentalist? The dictionary says anyone who understands the basics of a discipline is a fundamentalist. Can you call yourself a mathematician if you can't understand the fundamentals of mathematics? No! Similarly, to be called a scientist, you must understand the fundamentals of science. There can be a positive fundamentalist and a negative fundamentalist. A thief/robber who is an expert at the fundamentals of robbing is bad; but a doctor who knows the fundamentals of healing is good. I submit that no fundamentals of Islam are against humanity. How can you be a good Muslim if you do not understand the fundamentals of Islam? How can you practice Islam? According to the Webster's dictionary, the word fundamentalist was first used on Christians; however, the new Oxford dictionary lists Muslims as fundamentalists. Every Muslim should understand the fundamentals of Islam, and should be a fundamentalist. I am proud to call myself a 'Muslim Fundamentalist'. I submit that every Muslim should be a terrorist. Just as the policeman strikes terror in the heart of the thief, so should every Muslim strike terror in the heart of the thief, the rapist and other anti-social elements! The word fundamentalist is open to wide interpretation, just like the word freedom fighter. In olden days, the British would label those Indians fighting for India's freedom as terrorists; while for the Indians, these were freedom fighters.

Misconception # 7: Muslims are ruthless non-vegetarian people. Reply: God has granted Muslims the choice to be vegetarians as well as non-vegetarians. He has ordained in the holy book that everything that he has created in this world is for the enjoyment/pleasure of man (with certain restrictions and limits). It is ok for a Muslim to be a vegetarian by choice; it is also ok for him to be a non-vegetarian by choice. Science tells us that animal flesh is a complete protein food. It is easier to digest than the vegetarian food. If you look at the teeth of carnivorous animals like a tiger or a lion they are sharp and pointed, designed to tear flesh. The tiger and lion can eat only flesh; they cannot digest leaves and grass. On the other hand, the teeth of herbivorous animals like the cow and camel are flat. Designed to chew grass and leaves. These herbivorous animals can't digest flesh. But if you examine the teeth of human beings, they are both canine i.e. sharp and pointed, as well as flat. Therefore human beings can chew both vegetarian foods as well as non-vegetarian foods. Humans can digest plant foods as well as flesh. This ability to enjoy and digest both vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian food is a gift of God to humans. Hindu scriptures permit the eating of flesh. In fact, their books are replete with incidents showing festivals and ceremonies where meat was served. When Jainism and Buddhism started to become popular with their philosophies of ahimsa, i.e., non-violence towards animals, and started to win converts from Hindus, the Hindu priests adapted the same philosophy of ahimsa to win back those who had left the Hindu fold. This is how Hinduism changed over to vegetarianism. If no one eats meat the number of cattle will be uncontrollable. It will be a big problem about how to dispose of them.

Misconception # 8: Muslims eat animals and behave like animals. Reply: There is a saying that you are what you eat. Muslims eat only herbivorous animals (animals that eat only plants, grass, leaves etc). These animals are peaceful animals, like goat, lamb etc. Therefore, we are peaceful people. Muslims are prevented from eating carnivorous animals, i.e. animals that eat other animals. The holy prophet has prohibited us from eating snakes, lizards, cats, dogs, birds of prey etc. Some non-Muslims say that allowing slaughtered animals to bleed to death is torturing the animals. It is better to behead them in one quick shot on the neck. Some Muslims' response to this is that the non-Muslims attach the animals from behind, like cowards; while Muslims confront the animal in a manly manner, face-to-face, from the front. Of course this is not a good reason; it is only a joke. Scientific tests have proven that when the animal's throat is slit along with the windpipe and the vein (without damage to the spinal cord), the animal dies a painless death. The animal twitches its legs, it is not because of pain but because the heart has pumped out all the blood from the legs. It is this twitching of the lags, this thrashing about of the dying animal that leads the non-Muslim to believe that the animal is in pain. Blood carries toxins and impurities that are harmful for humans. Islam prohibits the eating/drinking of blood. Meat without blood lasts longer than meat with blood in it.

Misconception # 9: Going around the Kabah is idol worship. Reply: No religion is more vocal in condemning idol worship than Islam. The Muslims do not worship Kabah, only God, or Allah. While circumambulating the Kabah they chant: La Illa Ha Ill-lal-lah. (There is no object worthy of worship but Allah). The Kabah is for unifying Muslims at prayer. It would be chaotic if Muslims prayed in any direction

they chose. The Kabah provides a chance to unify in prayer as all Muslims face one spot, the Kabah. Throughout the globe people from various countries face North, South, East and West only to face the Kabah. When the Arabs drew the map of the globe, they put Makkah in the center; but when the Western people gained power, they put Greenwich in the center. But if you look at the map, Makkah continues to be in the center of the globe even today. Alhamdulillah! Some accuse Muslims to be idol worshippers because they kiss the black rock at Kabah. This they do only because they saw the prophet do it. The black stone has no power to benefit or harm you. In olden times, the call to prayer was given by standing on the top of Kabah. If Muslims were idol worshippers, would they stand on top of their 'idol' and call people to pray. Does a Hindu or a Christian stand on top of their idols and call others to join in the worship? Misconception # 10: Muslims are wrong in preventing non-Muslims from visiting Makkah. Reply: Allah has prohibited this. Makkah is not a place of tourism, but a place of reverence and worship. A non-Muslim has no reverence for Makkah, and therefore should not be there as a mere spectator. Although I am an Indian, I can't go to the cantonment area in Bombay where the military is based. I need a special permit. Similarly, all countries have their own rules to allow visitors in. Applicants must meet certain conditions insisted on by the host country. I had to meet the conditions of the US Government to visit USA. Similarly, there are conditions to visit Makkah. The condition is: You must recite from your heart "La illa-ha-ill-lallah, Mohammed-ur rasul Allah" (I bear witness that there is no object worthy of worship except Allah, and that Mohammed is the messenger of Allah). Misconception # 11: Muslims wrongly don't eat pork Reply: God has prohibited pork. There are several references even in the Bible where swine meat is prohibited. Science has associated 70 diseases with swine meat, the most dangerous being tapeworm, for which there is no cure. It causes irreparable damage to the insides of human beings. Even if a pig has been raised on a farm and its flesh is cooked very well at high temperatures, certain germs never die. The pig is a filthy animal; it eats human excreta. It has a protective instinct for its female. It is a shameless animal. Therefore people who eat its flesh, have no shame if their females mate with other men.